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Article (Published Version)

Walters, Gretchen M and Ece, Melis (2018) Getting ready for REDD+: recognition and donor-country project development dynamics in Central Africa. *Conservation and Society*, 15 (4). pp. 451-464. ISSN 0972-4923

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**Article**

## Getting ready for REDD+: Recognition and Donor-country Project Development Dynamics in Central Africa

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### Abstract

REDD+ (Reducing Emissions, Deforestation and forest Degradation+) is a United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) process through which governments reduce the impacts of climate change through forest conservation in a results-based payments scheme. Distinct from international negotiations about the REDD+ framework under the UNFCCC, there are also REDD+ projects that help governments to set up the institutional architecture, plans and strategies to implement REDD+. These capacity-building projects, in the first phase of 'REDD+ readiness', involve negotiations among national and international actors in which recognition and authority claims are used by participants to influence project-level negotiations. This study analyses the project development negotiations in a World Bank-led REDD+ capacity building regional project, involving six Central African countries between 2008 and 2011. It explores how the project created a 'negotiation table' constituted of national and regional institutions recognised by the donors and governments, and how this political space, influenced by global, regional and national political agendas led to 'instances' of recognition and misrecognition – in which some negotiating parties' claims of representation were acknowledge and affirmed, while others' claims were not. Focusing on Cameroon and Gabon, this article analyses how negotiations shaped full participation by Cameroon and only partial engagement by Gabon.

**Keywords:** REDD+, donors, Central Africa, theory of recognition, project dynamics

### INTRODUCTION

Central African governments claim to have a common vision for forest-related sustainable development. This vision is, in part, promoted by the Commission of Central African Forests (COMIFAC countries and partners 2011) – an intergovernmental body of ten Central African countries. Reducing Emissions, Deforestation and Degradation+ (REDD+) is a mechanism for reducing global climate change by increasing or maintaining

forest cover in developing countries by offering results-based payments. The international framework and agreements to allow the functioning of this mechanism are being negotiated under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The REDD+ framework adopted by the UNFCCC requires each country to fulfil specific steps to be eligible for "result-based" funds/payments, and has a phased approach: readiness (including capacity building and stakeholder consultation), implementation of demonstration projects, and results-based payments. This process, which takes place at the national scale, is funded and supported by different organizations, the most important of which are the UN-REDD Programme and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) hosted by the World Bank (WB) and steered by an independent Committee of Participants (that share responsibility between donors and beneficiary countries).

Following the completion of the REDD+ readiness process, the UN-REDD and FCPF can disburse funds to participating

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##### DOI:

10.4103/cs.cs\_16\_101

countries that finance the implementation of national strategies. In addition, there are many donors supporting the REDD+ process in countries by funding capacity-building projects, as illustrated by a case in this article. However, as each international and regional organization and government has its own views of REDD+'s potential impacts on carbon, emissions, land tenure, rights, land competition, and economics (Fairhead et al 2012; Wily 2012; Anderson and Zerriffi 2012), they also have different visions about the meaning of engagement in REDD+ (Corbera and Schroeder 2011). These visions are typically shaped by their existing environmental and development policies, as well as by negotiations with donors and national consultations about various projects to support their entry into REDD+. Governments may use different strategies to leverage their agendas in larger political spaces (Reyniers 2016).

This study uses the example of a regional REDD+ capacity-building project (referred to hereafter as "Project") to support REDD+ readiness in Central Africa to explore how the institutions that international donors and country governments choose to recognise as negotiators in a project created a 'negotiation table.' The Project negotiations focused on how funding was allocated at the national and regional levels and what activities formed the content of the Project. The Project negotiation 'table' – a term used by several interviewees – can also be seen as a 'broader political space' in which the participants are recognised as 'legitimate stakeholders' to debate and engage in the decision-making process. In this study it is important to note that the Project focal points at the national level were often the same senior representatives of their countries at the international climate change negotiations. This overlap of roles, including the development of the Project during the launching of the REDD+ readiness phase in participating Project countries, was important in the Project negotiation dynamics. Notably, the REDD+ negotiations, as a political space, must include 'multiple actors, interests and activities, involving several sources of formal and informal power and authority, which all influence each other and may or may not coincide in their interests and visions' (Corbera and Schroeder 2011: 90). As this case shows, a multiplicity of interests and activities were represented through a handful of actors: the Project negotiation table was constituted by the World Bank Project developers (representing the World Bank), senior members of the COMIFAC Secretariat (representing the Central African Commission of Ministers of Forests), and Climate Change Focal Points (representing their respective environmental or forestry ministries).

Throughout Project negotiations, amidst the strategic positioning for financial resources, two types of recognition pathways, acceptance and rejection (Assembé unpublished manuscript), emerged in particular 'instances of recognition' (*sensu* Ferrarese 2009) during the development phase of the Project, which involved six Central African states. At the same time that this Project was being developed, many other projects supporting REDD+ were also being discussed, both regionally

and nationally. It is likely that the Project dynamics we describe here are typical of similar regional projects involving high-level national representatives and large donors. The cases presented in the next sections show diverse perspectives from donors, regional and national representatives, with sometimes diverging opinions on how successful the Project negotiations were. As with any negotiation table, not all proposals will be acceptable and concessions must be made; such negotiations, especially when viewed in the wider political arena, are influenced by power dynamics and political agendas.

The Project development phase was initiated when the six project countries requested that the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) pool their country resources together and set up a regional project of 13 million USD. The World Bank became the agency that administered the Project funds. After initial agreement with participating countries on the Project concept, the World Bank drafted a Project document during 2008-2010, whose content was open to revision through further negotiations on Project content between 2010 and 2011. At the beginning of this development phase, first, the government representatives from six Central African countries and the World Bank officials agreed upon the general form and content of the regional engagement model for REDD+ in Central Africa in 2008. Then, the World Bank recognised the REDD+ national representatives chosen by their respective governments, and set up a process for Project negotiation, where national representatives and the World Bank recognised COMIFAC as the regional interlocutor and coordinator of the Project.

At the beginning, six COMIFAC countries expressed their interest in engaging in the Project: Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and the Republic of Congo. These countries comprise the majority of the humid tropical forest cover of the Congo River Basin (Marquant et al. 2015). However, through the three-year Project development phase (2008 to 2011), important differences emerged among the participant countries, particularly on how they were engaging in REDD+. During this process, while the funds were awarded to all six countries, some of these countries decided to access the funds, whereas one of them changed their engagement with REDD+ and threatened to reject funds that related to a portion of the project, only later partially engaging with the project (World Bank 2016).

The study looks at two aspects of recognition during Project negotiations in which the World Bank played a prominent role: (i) choice and recognition of regional and national-scale institutions that formed the 'negotiation table'; (ii) misrecognition of decision-making powers of some of the national institutions. The decision-making power over Project content, the ultimate financial accountability, liability and distribution of finances became central arenas where the 'recognition struggle' took place. Some country representatives like those from Gabon expected and demanded more decision-making power and contested that not all national representatives were 'equally' recognised by the Bank. In the

case of Cameroon, the process resulted in mutual recognition of the World Bank and Cameroon. Gabon, on the other hand, opted for the politics of exit (*sensu* Ferarresse 2009), whereby it chose to only partially engage with the Project.

The research used a “Studying Up” (Nader 1974) approach. Through studying up, the research focused on the social dynamics of global processes at the decision-maker scale and required interacting with authorities, donors, and executives. An institutional mapping and discourse analysis was conducted based on Project documents and the review of literature on Project implementation in Central Africa. Additional data for this study were collected through attending meetings in or related to Central Africa where REDD+ was a topic of a session (e.g. the Congo Basin Forest Partnership [CBFP] meetings<sup>1</sup>, Center for International Forest Research Forest Day, and the 2012 World Conservation Congress, Jeju South Korea). Twenty high-level interviews were conducted between 2012 and 2013 including with one minister, one presidential advisor, one Ambassador, four donor representatives, three regional governmental representatives, three Climate Focal Points, one National REDD+ Coordinator, and three members of civil society, sometimes interviewing informants multiple times. The paper focuses only on the development of the Project and not the implementation of the Project, which occurred after the research was conducted.

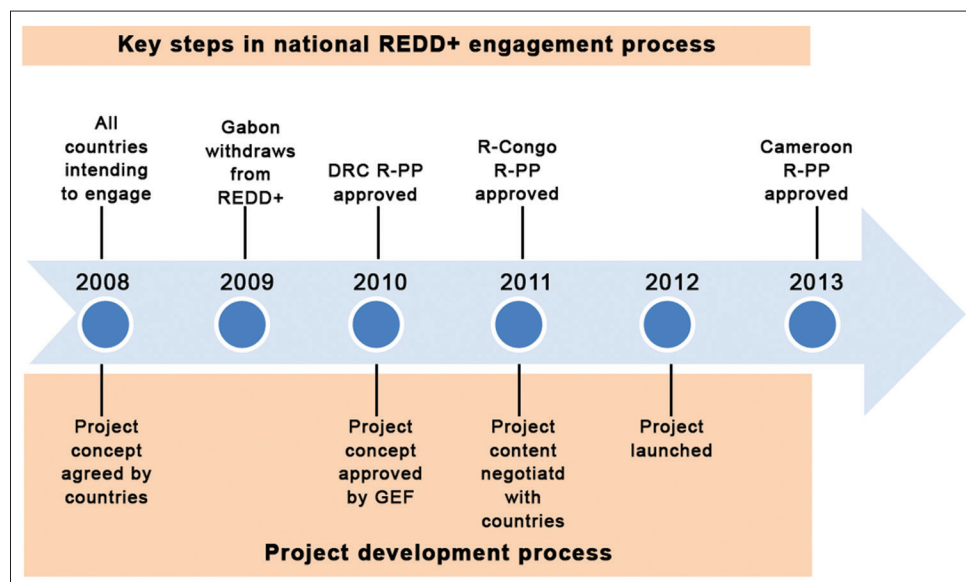
The next section of this article describes framing and background from a theoretical perspective. The third section describes the Project origins in 2008 and two-year concept approval phase (2008-2010). Starting with this concept approval phase, the countries initially held a common vision of REDD+ which then started to diverge during their engagement with the Project (see Figure 1). This divergence increased during their national REDD+ preparation processes, processes which were independent from the Project negotiation, but which influenced decisions made during the Project.

In this sense, the Project can be seen as a catalytic agent, which allowed pre-existing disagreements about national REDD+ engagement to emerge as countries developed the Project. The consultation with national and regional partners lasted eighteen months. The section describes the World Bank’s justifications of its institutional choices, and how national representatives and COMIFAC formulated their claims and expectations of recognition. It shows that the World Bank, national focal points and COMIFAC representatives each held different views on who was being heard at the negotiation table and who had the mandate to ‘represent’ the countries. Later in this section, we present the cases of Gabon and Cameroon. In the case of Gabon, the country instituted a policy of demanding recognition as an equal partner in all negotiation processes, disengaged from the REDD+ process and decided to only partially engage with the Project. In the case of Cameroon, its representative strongly challenged Project development but the country remained engaged in both REDD+ and the Project. The final section draws conclusions on regional collaboration and power dynamics of proposal development in the REDD+ context in Central Africa.

## FRAMING AND BACKGROUND

Almost half of the REDD+ funding for the African continent is awarded to Central Africa (Maniatis et al. 2013). There are studies on REDD+ in Central Africa considering gender (Peach Brown et al. 2011), priority setting (Sonwa et al. 2012), and technical capacities (Maniatis et al. 2013). Ours will, however, focus on how country-specific discourses, policies and actors help shape REDD+ (Corbera and Schroeder 2011); and especially on the dynamics of regional-scale initiatives involving multiple governments.

REDD+ implementation is a national process. However, because REDD+ is a global initiative, countries wishing to



**Figure 1**  
Key steps in the Project development and REDD+ engagement processes



take part are required to conform to international standards (UNFCCC 2013; United Nations 2015). At the time that the capacity-building Project described in this paper was being negotiated, the countries were also in various stages of the readiness phase of REDD+ (Figure 1). Although for official REDD+ pilot projects under the UN-REDD or FCPF projects governments assign national governmental institutions through which support needs to be directed, in the case of capacity building projects (which are largely outside of these processes), donors and agencies, here called intervening agents, may play a role in choosing the partners with whom they will work. In the case we will present here, we describe this process for a REDD+ capacity building Project. The process by which an intervening agent chooses to work with a particular institution is called ‘institutional choice’ (Ribot 2012). The institutional choices of intervening agents may focus on different levels of an organisation. For example, an international NGO may choose to work with a national NGO partner or a national NGO may choose to work with specific village-level institutions. Similarly, as the study case will attest, within the context of project development, donors may choose to work with both regional and national-scale institutions. Once chosen, the particular institution receives recognition by the intervening agency: its legitimacy is acknowledged by being endowed with decision-making powers as well as with financial means (such as project funding) (Ribot et al. 2008).

This article aims to contribute to the scholarship on recognition, in the light of work that focuses on the ‘struggle’ for recognition (e.g. claims by ethnic minorities for equality), where both sides must interact, or “play”, for recognition to occur (Ferrarese 2009). The theory of recognition, originating from Hegelian philosophy, has since been problematised through a lens of political theory (Fraser and Honneth 2003). Recognition, as described by Hegel, is a process through which individuals have an ‘intersubjective encounter’ resulting in an interdependency where they ‘struggle’ within a ‘space of reasons’; this results in one party recognising (acknowledging and affirming) the other (Honneth 2012). One example of this is the struggle by local people to have their customary land tenure recognised in REDD+ projects in Tanzania (Beymer-Farris and Bassett 2012).

Honneth recently applied these ideas to international relations. In his analysis of how states seek legitimacy, he specifies that, there is a ‘desire for international recognition’ oriented around the involvement, rather than the exclusion of other states, being influenced by interactions with other states or parties (Honneth 2012: 142). However, these interactions of state representatives may be driven by the representative’s own ideology and experience: “because political representatives must preserve legitimacy by acting as interpreters of the experiences and desires of their own respective citizenry, all encounters and relationships between states stand under the moral pressure generated by a conflict over recognition” (Honneth 2012). Stated as such, recognition involves a complex struggle involving individuals, governments and international organisations. During such processes, the blurring

of national and international interests can occur where the international processes and related donors may interact with national processes and actors in ways that promote both interests in diverse ways (Reyniers 2016).

Although Honneth’s examples were drawn from inter-state conflict, it is possible to consider the inter-state and donor-state relations in REDD+ through applying the Choice and Recognition Framework (Ribot et al. 2008); this framework focuses on intergroup relations and how institutional choices impact the recognition and power dynamics of organisations. The framework modulates the Hegel-Honneth concept of recognition, and its effects, from the individual up to the institutional level (Ribot et al. 2008). This take on recognition, however, can be enriched by theories of recognition which consider it to be a “performative act”, whereby recognition may be conceived as a play in which there are actors (Markell 2000). Recognition can take many forms such as political or legal recognition of collective entities (Emcke 2002), but often it first must be claimed. Claims for recognition can manifest in a variety of ways (e.g. protests, dialogue, refusal to negotiate with a group) and may occur during an “instance of recognition” whereby the conditions for recognition, as agreed by the parties, are accepted or rejected (Ferrarese 2009), the latter, also known as misrecognition (Taylor 1992; see Faye 2017 for further nuances). A demand for recognition can arise because there is a lack of recognition and the process of being recognised by another entity is thought to improve the situation; in this sense, it is part of a political struggle (Thomassen 2011).

As Allan and Dauvergne write, “The North needs the South to preserve, maintain or repair the global environment” (2013). In the REDD+ context, this can be seen through the lens of recognition whereby Northern carbon-emitting countries and southern carbon-absorbing countries recognise each other in the process to mitigate climate change. This recognition process often results in REDD+ policies developing in different ways according to national contexts and influenced by historical, cultural, and societal legacies (Easterly 2013; Grindle and Thomas 1989; Mkandawire 2014). However, this process can be seen as a play of recognition, taking place within a particular framework, where access to international funding (Grindle & Thomas 1989) is an important factor. As Mkandawire (2014: 190) notes “economic conjuncture is important in determining the donors’ leverage and recipient’s acceptance of foreign diktat and the balance of forces between domestic and external forces”.

## ARGUMENT

### The International REDD+ and Congo Basin Regional REDD+ Project

The initial idea of proposing a regional-scale REDD+ capacity-building project arose in Libreville, Gabon in February 2008 (COMIFAC 2010). The six member countries of COMIFAC agreed on a concept note that was submitted

to the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Council late that year. In this concept note all countries indicated their willingness to build their 'technical capacity' to engage in REDD+. At that time, all countries were at the same level of REDD+ engagement: none had formally engaged in the then-new process. Between 2008, when the concept note was submitted, and 2010, when the Project concept was approved by the GEF, much had changed regarding each country's engagement with REDD+. This change in their national level REDD+ implementation heavily impacted their desire to engage with the Project (see Figure 1).

The discourse underpinning the six Central African countries' willingness to engage with REDD+ in the Concept Note was shaped by the previously agreed COMIFAC vision of sustainably managing forests across state boundaries – including harmonising their legal frameworks, increasing each country's technical capacities, and knowledge on sustainable forest management. This vision, and the discourse that articulated it, constituted the basis for creating a space for common reasoning amongst states regarding a regional capacity-building project, creating also a framework for the interaction among the states that Honneth described. This section explores how the REDD+ development phase resulted in a differentiation in the countries' engagement with the Project, and simultaneously, in their moving away from this initial common vision, which led one Climate Change Focal Point to conclude that the Project process caused an "explosion of the Congo Basin" (Douala, Cameroon, in person interview, 2013), a perception likely linked to the changing dynamics of REDD+ engagement by each country and the changing regional vision for how COMIFAC countries engaged with climate change issues. During this period of Project development, COMIFAC was refining its regional vision for sustainable forest management; the previous 'Plan de Convergence' did not mention climate change (COMIFAC 2005), whereas the one approved in 2015 did, specifically mentioning REDD+ (e.g. COMIFAC 2015).

In 2007, at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties 13 in Bali, COMIFAC representatives were able, along with other states, to negotiate for its member countries to extend the now REDD+ to include sustainable development (Allan and Dauvergne 2013). This joint vision on REDD+ continued the following year, when the COMIFAC member countries agreed to propose a regional Project; this same year, the FCPF was created. Under this program, which complements the UNFCCC, a 'Readiness Fund' was established to help states prepare for REDD+. To qualify for FCPF Readiness Funds, countries are required to take certain steps towards REDD+ implementation, determining what it meant to be recognised as 'legitimate stakeholders' in REDD+ and receive funds from the newly created FCPF. The countries were expected to abide by the conditions that set the new terms of engagement. The first step in the process is for the countries to submit what was then called a Readiness Plan Idea Note (R-PIN). Once the R-PIN is approved by the FCPF, the country governments must then submit a Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP).

Other funds, such as those of the Project described in this study, were made available to support country engagement in the REDD+ process, but external to the FCPF and UNREDD processes. Through the Project concept note text, the six Central African governments had expressed their expectation of, and demand for, recognition to international donors that funded REDD+ related programmes.

In 2008, the FCPF had approved the R-PPs of the countries negotiating the Project except for Equatorial Guinea<sup>2</sup>. Each of these countries had different speeds of engagement with the REDD+ process (FCPF 2017). While the DRC took one year to submit the R-PP, the Republic of Congo took close to two years, followed by Cameroon where the process took three years (Figure 1). This indicated that while the DRC, the Republic of Congo and Cameroon all remained engaged with REDD+ (thus, continued to demand recognition), the time for each country to produce an acceptable R-PP was different (Maniatis et al. 2013)<sup>3</sup>. Another difference also emerged during this period where some countries continued their engagement despite the length of period that required them to have their R-PP approved (e.g. Cameroon), while others disengaged from the process (e.g. Gabon). Gabon took less time to complete the requirements to be eligible for a R-PP preparation grant than Cameroon (Maniatis et al. 2013); it paused its engagement in 2009 at the stage of R-PP grant submission and preferred to opt for a Low Emissions Development approach (as we explain below), which promotes a holistic development approach cross sectors while reducing emissions. Furthermore, the DRC advanced very quickly in their REDD+ process. Some interviewees perceived this advancement being due to preferential support by UN-REDD, and in the process, undermining regional collaboration (COMIFAC 2012b: 12). The various speeds at which countries prepared for REDD+ caused a difference in the regional playing field, something that the Project was originally meant to address. A Climate Change Focal Point expressed that he believed that the UN-REDD choice to facilitate one country over another was "destroying" COMIFAC (Douala, Cameroon, speech at the CBFP meeting, 2012). Such differences in REDD+ engagement had impacts on Project development, as we will describe later.

After Project approval in 2011, this divergence among COMIFAC countries on REDD+ continued and became salient during the international climate change negotiations. During the UNFCCC's 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP-17) in Durban, held in 2012, a joint declaration on REDD+ was signed by some COMIFAC governments and donors; Gabon refused to sign this joint declaration, and Equatorial Guinea was not present at the meeting (Maniatis et al. 2013). Later, COMIFAC updated its regional 'Plan de Convergence' where REDD+ is considered as one approach to achieve sustainable forest management (COMIFAC 2015). At the time of the Project negotiation, there was no agreed regional vision for REDD+ in Central Africa. This lack of a regional consensus was clear in Project documents, studies, public statements at meetings, and in interviews during the study period. At a

Congo Basin Forest Partnership meeting in Douala in 2013, a regional REDD+ project manager from Central Africa publicly asked: “is there really a communal position on REDD+ or is this just a façade?”

This statement and related events suggest that the regional vision for REDD+ that had emerged in 2008 had disintegrated over the course of two years, causing strong interactions between what was happening in international climate change negotiations and engagement with REDD+ processes to have an impact on Project development.

As we have shown in this section, the gap among the countries’ engagement with REDD+ increasingly widened after the acceptance of the Project Concept Note, during the R-PP development process. The following section focuses on the Project negotiations that took place among COMIFAC, the World Bank and the country Focal Points between 2010 and 2011. During this time, when the individual countries’ R-PP development was ongoing, an 18-month REDD+ Project consultation process was initiated. As we will show, these consultations opened a space for debate and expression of differences of opinions regarding the mandate of COMIFAC and the climate change focal points. We argue that these differences showed how the ‘negotiation’ table was shaped by the institutional choices of the GEF Project execution agency<sup>4</sup>, the World Bank, and how different recognition claims were put forth by those recognised as being part of this political space.

### Creating the negotiation table: the institutional choices and recognition claims

After the GEF’s approval of the Concept Note in 2010, the Project content was developed and was initiated under the coordination of COMIFAC. At this time, the FCPF was also preparing grants at the national level which were intended to be complementary to the Project and focus on national needs. The Project was meant to coordinate with FCPF (and UN-REDD) and avoid redundancies and inefficiencies. COMIFAC’s recognition as the Project Coordinating organisation or by the World Bank and country governments was a key institutional choice. Although the World Bank and country representatives chose COMIFAC for this role<sup>5</sup>, their reasons to grant this recognition were different<sup>6</sup>.

COMIFAC, as an international organisation, is composed of Congo Basin states represented by their “national institutions in charge of forests” (e.g. Ministries of Forest) (COMIFAC 2012b, 12). The member states, through their forest ministries, jointly decide on priority actions that could harmonise their sustainable forest management and conservation policies according to an agreed Convergence Plan (COMIFAC 2005). However, COMIFAC cannot bring governments to order and there is no sanctioning process if governments do not carry out decisions made by COMIFAC’s Council of Ministers (Kam Yogo 2012). Therefore, COMIFAC cannot hold member states accountable for their actions that diverge from the agreed Convergence Plan.

The main reasons behind the Congo Basin governments’ recognition of COMIFAC as the coordinator of a regional-scale Project was that COMIFAC had already been carrying out this coordination role in sustainable forest management, and that they expected the same type of ‘high-level’ coordination – that is a coordination at the level of forest ministries – in other arenas, such as climate change and therefore REDD+. For Climate Focal Points<sup>7</sup>, who represent their governments’ Ministries of Forests or Ministries of Environment in United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations, the Project was expected to be a primarily country-driven process. COMIFAC is not a ‘representative’ of the countries, in the sense that it can impose sanctions on members in case of non-compliance but it can only act as a facilitator in the negotiations among those countries. In such cooperation, the Executive Secretary of COMIFAC does not represent the participating countries, only Climate Focal Points of COMIFAC member states do.

The World Bank’s concept of recognition of COMIFAC as the legitimate representative of a regional-scale project however differed from that of Climate Focal Points. The World Bank considered a regional-scale project to be an innovation in their traditional approach which typically focuses on national projects. According to this vision, the Congo Basin Project was not a ‘multi-country’ project, where the country’s weight in decision-making and benefit sharing is determined according to commonly agreed principles. It was considered to be a ‘regional’ project and each country was expected to make ‘compromises’ to increase the ‘benefits’ of the whole region, while reducing administrative costs of administering several national projects and complementing other REDD+ grants (e.g. FCPF) to the countries which focused on national needs. While the World Bank representatives seemed to accept the National Focal points’ decision-making authority by stating that they would hold the majority of the seats in the steering committee and so “reflect the dominant role that countries play in project decision making” (COMIFAC 2012a, 12), the interviews with Bank officials and Project managers seemed to indicate that the Bank’s expectation from COMIFAC in return for the Bank’s granting its institutional recognition, was for COMIFAC to ‘represent’ the member country governments in Project negotiations. Thus the expectations of the role of COMIFAC in the Project were different by the World Bank and the countries.

This struggle over representation came to surface during the 18-month Project consultation process, which refined the Project activities and budget and was coordinated by COMIFAC. COMIFAC representatives regarded this consultation process as being “largely participatory” (COMIFAC 2012b). Yet, during the regional consultation meetings, National REDD+ focal points openly stated that the Project consultations were carried out following a top-down approach. According to one person on the Project steering committee, the World Bank was making decisions in the place of the governments, despite ideas being put forward by governmental representatives during Project development.



During Project negotiations, the World Bank sought to create a regional Project in line with the original Concept Note which addressed the original needs for REDD+ capacity in 2008 when all countries were at the beginning of their REDD+ national processes. These perceptions and claims demonstrate that the development of the Project occurred in a complex setting with many issues at play and which evolved during the early stages of Project idea development. The needs were quite different when the Project content was being negotiated two years later. Thus, during Project development, country focal points sought to have the varying national progress in REDD+ be considered in the Project while additionally allowing the countries to maintain some control over national funding, which was later agreed.

During the consultations, which were central to the negotiation of a regional Project, the role of COMIFAC also became a subject of debate. One World Bank project designer said that “the member states did not appear to support COMIFAC” and that the COMIFAC coordinator was not “communicating enough” to the national Focal Points (Yaoundé, Cameroon, in person interview, 2012). The same person later indicated at several Project meetings that COMIFAC seemed only to “decorate” the meeting, with states seemingly not wanting COMIFAC to manage work at the national level (Yaoundé, Cameroon, in person interview, 2013). This indicated clearly that the World Bank was expecting COMIFAC to play a different role, especially in terms of financial accountability, than what the country governments were expecting.

There was also a debate about the role of the Focal Points. COMIFAC representatives stressed that the Focal Points were effectively representing their respective governments’ point of view and interests. But one Project developer of the World Bank insisted that some Focal Points were not doing so, questioning the representation and accountability of them to their forestry ministers in the Project development process. He claimed that the Focal Points, which were chosen and recognised by their Ministers, did not properly represent the Ministries’ views and were not accountable to them. Other World Bank Project designers claimed that the World Bank and the civil society organisations considered the national Focal Points to have “too much power” in the process, implying that they acted outside of the representation role given to them by their Ministries. This showed that while there was a mutual recognition amongst COMIFAC and the Focal Points, this did not seem to be the case for the World Bank.

At the Project negotiation table, one of the chief concerns and points of divergence between the World Bank and the COMIFAC country representatives was the distribution of funds. The negotiations on the distribution of funding constituted, therefore, another instance where the struggle over recognition between the World Bank, national Focal Points, and senior members of the COMIFAC Secretariat took place.

In line with the vision of a ‘regional’ approach to project development, the World Bank Project developers argued for the necessity and validity of the World Bank’s regional vision

by claiming that a multi-country project does not necessarily have benefits for the region, whereas a regional project will have benefits for all countries involved. Their argument was based on the affirmation that the main objective of the Project was to build the “capacity” of all countries. They presented “capacity building” as the most important ‘common’ goal and ‘collective’ problem of the region. Thus, the states brought their country budgets together to achieve an economy of scale in addressing this collective problem. The World Bank insisted that the funds of all countries, pooled together, should be used to “equalize” all countries’ REDD+ capacity. The Focal Points, however, argued that the funds should be allocated according to each country’s needs. At every preparatory meeting, the discussion went back to negotiation of the country budgets (or “envelopes”). According to World Bank Project developers, the insistence of the country representatives in understanding the benefit they would gain in pooling of their money for a regional project was problematic. They claimed that the Project was “regional” and this should not be an issue because all countries would benefit from it. By contrast, many national Focal Points did not agree with this approach and wished to have more decision-making power over how funding at the national level would be spent. Several focal points argued that the World Bank “acted like it was their money”, when in fact the Project funding allocation was meant to be decided amongst the countries, with the World Bank supervisory role to ensure the efficient use of funds. The World Bank was keen to have the Project be a complement to the national funding being awarded by the FCPF and so wanted to ensure that the national envelopes did not duplicate this funding source.

These discussions over the budget and country envelopes are significant from the perspective of recognition debates in several respects. First, as Ribot and others have argued (2008), one of the most important implications of the institutional choices of intervening agents, like the World Bank, is to provide technical and financial means to institutions that they recognise. As such, the provision of financial means constitutes an act of recognition. Considering that recognition is two-sided, this implies that the provision of financial means as an act of recognition is accepted by both the intervening agents, which grant recognition, and by the country governments, which expect and ask for international recognition. Yet, the expectation of the National Focal Points – representing their government’s interests and expectations – involves the recognition of their decision-making power concerning the ‘envelopes’ granted to them. Thus, the World Bank’s insistence in holding the decision-making power regarding the spending of the country funds with COMIFAC, and introducing the condition that each country should be using its national ‘envelopes’ to level the ‘playing field’ at regional scale, was understood as a partial recognition. The World Bank as the executing agency of the Project and its funds was thought to be overstepping its mandate by trying to force many decisions during the Project development process. In one meeting in Brazzaville, a World Bank representative publicly questioned one national representative’s views on the Project, leaving



many with the impression that Project development was not a country-driven process (Yaoundé, Cameroon, in person interview, 2013).

Nonetheless, a common ground was found and national envelopes (contributions within the regional project which were granted back to the countries) were created by restructuring the budget to allocate funds to the envelopes. Even though some Focal Points considered the cancelling of proposed regional studies to create country envelopes to be spent according to government's needs and priorities as a success, the overall feeling regarding how far the Project answered the countries' expectations and demands for recognition at the negotiation table was mixed. Some Focal Points were very vocal about their opinion that their government's needs and interests – whom they claimed to represent – was not granted sufficient 'voice'. Some national Focal Points shared the idea that the World Bank was imposing too many conditions during Project development on the member country states. On the other hand, one Focal Point considered the approach of high-level consultation on the Project to be a positive, but rare approach (phone interview, 2013). Similarly, one senior member of the COMIFAC Secretariat considered the Project to be a model, giving COMIFAC high visibility (Yaoundé, Cameroon, in person interview, 2013). For COMIFAC, this regional approach was important for the international recognition of the organisation.

At the Project launch in April 2012, one member of an international organisation observed that many partners were unsatisfied with the World Bank's approach to project administration, as it placed too many conditions on the states, creating a humiliating process for them (Switzerland, in person interview, 2013). This concurs with some national viewpoints. One Focal Point said that some donors use COMIFAC to push an agenda on countries. He added that even if donors attempted to benefit from the weakness of representing their interests, countries should become more responsible for representing their interests. At the end, he also underlined that "COMIFAC represents us." At the same time, he recognised that COMIFAC was still considered as a 'representative' of the region's governments' collective interests, and the country governments should have worked harder to create a more democratic forum for the Project negotiation process.

By contrast, COMIFAC disagreed that it was being used by the World Bank to impose their views. One senior member of the COMIFAC secretariat said that the World Bank never imposed their ideas on the states (Yaoundé, Cameroon, in person interview, 2013). However, in other environmental fora, the COMIFAC Secretariat acknowledges the unequal power relations that often exist between the donors and the member states. In a Congo Basin Forest Partnership meeting speech (Douala, March 2013), the COMIFAC Executive Secretary publicly commented, although not directly referencing the Project, that in general many projects did not have proper consultation on project development. He argued that those with money (donors) 'direct' (in French, '*commandent*') the activities of others, suggesting an unequal power relation between funding donors and recipients. This unequal power

relation, manifest in donor control of some funding and decision-making processes, is also inherent in the Project negotiation table described here, which became an arena of struggle for recognition. The Congo Basin countries had formulated their expectations of recognition and demanded recognition from the World Bank through their initial adherence to the Project concept. This indicated their willingness to be recognised. At the same time it indicated they considered the donors as indispensable providers of recognition (Ferrarese 2009). Participation in the international climate change negotiations brought them status in the international political sphere and strengthened their legitimacy at the international level, which probably strengthened their position to negotiate the Project with the World Bank, in this instance. At the same time, the donors clearly had more financial power than any of the country governments involved in the Project. This power difference made it difficult for the country governments to push for full-fledged recognition of their authority, particularly in financial matters. There was a significant difference of opinion in the World Bank not wishing to duplicate other national level funding, and the countries wishing to have national envelopes.

If recognition through engagement with the Project negotiating table was shaped by these important power relations, including successes and failures, how do we explain the case of rejection of recognition? In the following section, two cases will be given. The case of Cameroon will demonstrate that the acceptance of recognition was tied to a particular national vision of development into which REDD+ was integrated. Even though the Project negotiation involved denial of recognition – particularly in financial matters – Cameroon continued its engagement in the Project. The case of Gabon will demonstrate that it too has a national vision of development, but it diverged from Cameroon in that it could take the risk of denial of recognition by the World Bank, due to availability of its own financial resources and its desire to pursue its own development agenda independently of the demands of REDD+. Thus, during the Project negotiation, Gabon disengaged from the international REDD+ process to pursue its own agenda of low emission development and thus agreed to only partially engage with the Project.

### **The REDD+ negotiation arena and its impact on project negotiation**

#### ***The Case of Cameroon: REDD+ is for our development***

Cameroon is one of the six countries in COMIFAC that accepted to be part of the REDD+ process since 2008. It started to be engaged more intensively with REDD+ process in 2011 during the preparation of the REDD+ Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP). The case of Cameroon shows that national interests play an important part in the search for international recognition through the acceptance of REDD+. However, the case of Cameroon is significant as this demand for recognition and its acceptance is formulated in a way that emphasizes national priorities.

What does the REDD+ vision for Cameroon look like? The example given by a Cameroonian senior member of the national climate change negotiation team is illustrative of the government of Cameroon's position on REDD+. Acting as a representative in both the national and regional REDD+ debates, this senior member regularly states publicly versions of the same idea, which can be summarised as "it is up to us [Cameroonians] to give REDD+ its content" (Douala, Cameroon, statement in a meeting, 2012). For him, "REDD needs to respond to the needs of the country" (Yaoundé, Cameroon, speech, 2013).

At the 2013 'Sustainable Forest Management in Central Africa: Yesterday, today and tomorrow' event in Yaoundé, in a speech, he said that all Central African countries dream of being an emerging economy and that, "forests here are not just carbon" but rather a way to develop. The Cameroonian representative indicated that he would not like to see the subsistence farmers of his country not being able to live off of the land (Douala, Cameroon, in person interview, 2012). These statements agree with the vision presented in Cameroon's R-PP. The R-PP clearly states, "For Cameroon, REDD+ is a development tool"<sup>8</sup> (République du Cameroun 2013: 1) and based on its sustainable development objective as part of the *Document de Stratégie pour la Croissance et l'Emploi* which aims to help Cameroon's economy develop, focused on agricultural development amongst other things (Government of Cameroon 2009). Thus, the document underscores that the Cameroonian government aims to use REDD+ to modernise agriculture, manage rangelands and livestock, increase energy efficiency, and sustainable management of forest concessions. In the 2013 Sustainable Forest Management Day in Cameroon, the climate change focal point stated, "If REDD+ doesn't work for development, then we need to set it aside." To this, the room applauded.

In terms of the Project described in this paper, from Cameroon's perspective, it was essential to have a Project that could help them to carry out 'their' vision for development, which seeks economic independence. This is similar to the official development discourse in the 1980s, which emphasized endogenous development both for and by the Cameroonian people (Ntube 1998; Dessouane and Verre 1986). Cameroon sought, therefore, recognition at the Project negotiating table and from the World Bank as a way to advance its own development priorities.

During the Project negotiation, the representative for Cameroon continually evoked Cameroon's vision for REDD+. For him, there was a need to have a national-level access to funding in the regional Project, rather than pooling all resources at the regional level and so the debate over Project envelopes was critical. The concurrent processes, which were intended to be complementary, of national-level REDD+ strategy development with the vision of the regional Project development presented here generated a constant tension between Cameroonian Focal Points and the World Bank. Some World Bank Project developers criticized Cameroon's outspoken stance on its expectations of the Project. They

argued that this stance was counterproductive to the regional Project, including pooling regional resources, and it was like 'one step forward, one step back' at every Project development meeting, significantly prolonging the Project development process. This struggle during Project negotiations can be seen as a struggle for recognition of Cameroon's national development vision within the political space created by international REDD+ negotiations.

Despite the rocky Project negotiations, where the Cameroon representative took the lead on successfully negotiating the 'envelopes' as earlier described, Cameroon did agree to participate in the Project. However, in struggling for recognition of national visions in REDD+, Cameroon was also vulnerable. There was a risk that their vision would not be recognised. In such a case, Cameroon would have been faced with Ferrarese's "choice of instance", a choice made of when to accept or reject recognition, during which an organisation (such as the Government of Cameroon) decides if it will accept the recognition offered by international partners.

The choice of Cameroonian representatives, acting in the name of their country, was a 'choice of instance'. This choice was influenced by many risk factors. In rejecting the Project, Cameroon would have lost funding from the Project to help them increase their capacity to participate in the international climate change negotiations (since an objective of the project was capacity building in this area). In rejecting REDD+ altogether, Cameroon might have lost an opportunity to further its national development goals through REDD+. This points to the importance of the wider context in the Project negotiation arena in this struggle for the recognition of their vision of REDD+.

The influence of the international negotiation arena on Cameroon's position in the Project negotiation table was clearly linked to Cameroon's insistence on having the national envelopes to help them carry forth their vision for REDD+. Cameroon was able to use the recognition it obtained from sitting at the Project negotiation table to secure funds it wanted for advancing its national REDD+ strategy, which came in complement of additional funds from the FCPF. However, the development of national envelopes important for Cameroon and oriented towards national REDD+ activities catalysed a discussion with Gabon, which during the Project development was disengaging with the REDD+ process.

### ***The case of Gabon: a demand for equal seating at the table***

The case of Gabon presents another 'choice of instance', this time resulting in a threat to reject the full Project (and later only partially engaging with it). Early in the Project conception in 2008, Gabon was engaged in both the international climate change and regional Project processes. However, during the 2009 presidential elections, Ali Ben Bongo Ondimba, became president—a change after some forty years of rule by his father. With him came the politics of 'Emergence', where it was promised that growing Gabon's economy would help it to become a middle-income country.

Since then, the dynamics of Gabon engaging with foreign partners has taken a different tone, led by the President himself.

In a May 2012, presidential speech at Africa Day at the London School of Economics, the president Ali Ben Bongo Ondimba declared: “We need to sit confidently at the negotiation table, sure of our value proposition and of our strength, having learned from the past, taking into account the present and able to be decisive about a vision for the future.” He went on, “By playing its full role as partner, my government intends to give clear direction to our investors, by identifying, creating and promoting opportunities for you to come and work with us to implement a new vision for harmonious growth.”

The idea of being equals at any table was mirrored in nearly every interview conducted for this study with a Gabonese official. According to one Gabonese Ambassador, Gabon is looking for “*real partnership*” on projects (Yaoundé, Cameroon, in person interview, 2012). This differs from neighbouring countries, which do not have this discourse and which tend to accept projects rather than demand to be co-developers.

The Project development process coincided with the time when Gabon began to disengage from the REDD+ process as a consequence of choices not directly related to the project and stopped advancing its FCPF application in 2009. This disengagement was reinforced at the UNFCCC COP-17 in Durban, South Africa, when a joint declaration on REDD+ was signed by many Central African countries and some donor countries (COMIFAC countries and partners 2011), except Gabon and Equatorial Guinea<sup>9</sup>. According to one presidential advisor the reason for not signing was that Gabon had not been consulted on the idea until the declaration was in an advanced draft. Indeed, Gabon was not represented at the preparatory meeting, which was deemed by one of the convenors to have been an “informal consultation” (Ndikumagenge 2011). In an assessment of the declaration by one journalist, the disengagement of Gabon (and Equatorial Guinea) was explained by stating that these two countries were in a “rare category of having high forest resources, other financial means and a ‘nationalist character’, which permits them to go-it-alone” (Wa Namasso 2012).

According to one Gabonese Ambassador, having control over their natural resources is important and resource use decisions should not be imposed from the North (Libreville, Gabon, in person interview, 2013). However, Gabon appears to be changing the terms of engagement and has begun to dictate its requirements for engagement with them. During a CBFP meeting in March 2012, the Gabon Climate Change Focal Point publicly declared that engagement in REDD+ did not result in a partnership. The same person indicated in an interview in Douala in March 2013, that according to his government, “One should not hold out one’s hand for gifts, but rather, shake another’s hand [as equals]”. As another Gabonese official clearly stated, “Gabon does not wish to have things imposed on it, but rather wants a partnership” (speech by Gabon’s COMIFAC Focal Point, 12<sup>th</sup> PFBC meeting, March 2013).

During Project development, Gabon ceased to engage in REDD+ and also threatened to withdraw from the Project, especially when national envelopes focused on REDD+

were proposed. Gabon was then demonised by regional and international actors for their proposed withdrawal, according to one senior governmental advisor. At later stages in the Project consultation process, there were attempts by the COMIFAC secretariat to convince Gabon to remain fully in the Project. When Gabon signalled that it would withdraw from the Project, one of Gabon’s senior governmental advisors noted that they had explained their position on REDD+, but the COMIFAC Secretariat preferred to expect Gabon’s participation (World Conservation Congress, in person interview, 2013). Gabon later only signed a “partial implementation agreement for the execution of one subcomponent” (World Bank 2016). According to one senior governmental advisor, Gabon, rather, sought to develop their country on their own terms, rather than according to the timing and demands of the international REDD+ process. With REDD+ being the focus of the national Project envelopes, Gabon could not agree to accept this part of the Project.

Interviewees explained Gabon’s threat of Project disengagement in various ways. Although some Project developers said that Gabon’s threat of disengagement was due to personal politics or their financial resources enabling them to turn down climate finance, information from other sources presented here show that Gabon’s condition for engaging in projects was that it wanted to be consulted as an equal partner. They noted that Gabon can posit this condition because it is not dependent on REDD+ funds.

What enables a country to exercise their right to refuse participation in such international projects? Gabon’s exit from the REDD+ process and threat to disengage from the Project itself reset the power dynamic – by demonstrating that Gabon did not need to play the game set up by others around the ‘table’. Groups seeking recognition may use a “refusal to sit down at the negotiating table” (Ferrarese 2009: 607) to change the conditions of the negotiations. Here Gabon clearly stated that it wants such recognition – equal recognition that the discourse of the Project and REDD+ processes laid out as their operating principle. Gabonese officials use the same metaphor of a table with the possible seating of equals. Their ability to withdraw enabled them to negotiate equal rank, while also continuing on their own path to climate smart development, as envisaged in their national plans.

But, what are the costs of Gabon rejecting the REDD+ process or a related Project? Clearly, rejecting REDD+ has a cost for international climate change mitigation advocates. It might diminish the international fight against climate change, which could be the case if Gabon were not already engaged in low emissions development. Globally the advocates of REDD+ consider these costs to be high. Nationally, the costs may also be high. Firstly, resources linked to these relationships may be reduced, in this case both in terms of carbon credits purchased and forests as the key source to carbon credit schemes. Secondly, rejecting this global REDD+ process could damage Gabon’s relations with organisations or individuals that are important collaborators on other fronts, such as infrastructure development, biodiversity conservation and other national priorities (Ferrarese 2009: 611).



In Gabon's case, the FCPF now classifies Gabon as an 'inactive country' and one which has 'lost guaranteed access to FCPF grant funding (FCPF 2013)'. Although Gabon wished to engage on climate smart development on their own terms, there are other reasons that Gabon might be able to choose to be inactive, rooted in Gabon's history as being more economically independent through high petroleum rents. Gabon is one of the most important oil producers in Africa, and oil rents have driven the country's higher GDP (Wunder 2003). Oil rent in many ways fostered an economic independence in terms of funding development projects, as detailed in the *Premier Plan de Développement Economique et Social* in 1966 (Yates 1996)<sup>10</sup>.

Furthermore, Gabon has a history of engaging on endeavours on their own terms. The best example was the construction of the costly Transgabonais Railroad in the 1980s<sup>11</sup> despite loans being refused from the World Bank and being generally discouraged by other governments to conduct the project (Pourtier 1989), it was constructed against all odds and led by the President, himself (Yates 1996). Historian Yates quoted the then President, when discussing why Gabon at that time was moving towards modernisation at all costs, "We want to do in a few decades what others took centuries to do" (Yates 1996: 183 citing World Bank 1991; World Bank 1991).

This threat of rejection of the Project constituted a 'choice of instance' whereby Gabon proposed to leave the Project negotiation table. A second 'choice of instance' occurred when Gabon did not sign the regional REDD+ declaration. Although both Cameroon and Gabon have attempted different models of economic independence, Gabon's tradition of developing independently combined with a higher GDP seems to play a large role in its ability to choose which tables to sit at and which to abandon.

Project negotiations may never be easy, however, it is possible that the recognition that the Climate Change Focal Points achieved in the international climate change negotiation arena gave them a higher status and expectation of being treated differently by a donor like the World Bank. During the time of the project, as one informant noted, this power dynamic was shifting the power balance towards them in a way that had possibly not happened prior to the climate change negotiations. This shift likely caused the World Bank to rethink how they work with national representatives in project development. Indeed, more spaces for equitable engagement are needed in the environmental sector and it falls to those with traditionally more power to enable those spaces (Martin et al. 2016).

## CONCLUSION

Africa's forests are a key area needed to stabilise the world's changing climate. Their integration in REDD+ can be central to achieving climate change mitigation. However, African governments have been weak in influencing REDD+ agendas, often finding themselves on the receiving end of information (Atela et al. 2016), something that the Project analysed in this article sought to address. The effectiveness of REDD+ projects

remains to be seen, for example, in how much they can influence changes in land tenure (Larson et al. 2013) or other aspects related to forests. Project governance can also be a factor shaping REDD+ projects' contribution to reducing pressures on forests. The global agenda of climate mitigation, however, cannot be achieved if the international proponents do not recognise the agendas and needs of countries upon which successful mitigation depends. To maintain the engagement of countries that actually have the ability to withdraw at the negotiating table, negotiations must start with participatory parity (e.g. Fraser 2003). They will not accept subordination of their forests or people to external agendas.

North-South relations via donors and international agencies in Africa have been explored through multiple lenses, focusing on paternalism and partnership (Murithi 2011), elite policy transfer (Chiumbu 2011) and top-down versus bottom up approaches (Green 2012). Project development, especially in the climate change arena, is one area in which the politics of recognition between international and national interests plays out.

In her analysis of claims for recognition, Fraser indicates that for the claim to be valid, claimants should show that the institutionalised, dominant thinking denies parity and that the solution proposed does not deny parity to other parties (Fraser 2003: 39–41). In Gabon's case, their request for a seat at the table signals that there is an inequality of those currently sitting at the table versus those denied a seat. Furthermore, if their request is granted, Gabon gaining a seat may still leave neighbouring countries outside of this negotiation table. Although Fraser might consider this to invalidate a claim, in this case it does not. If Gabon obtains a place at the table, their presence and the noted absence of other Central African countries would demonstrate further inequality. Such a table would likely open up other seats in the future, as future processes would likely not be able to deny seats to neighbouring countries. Indeed, it opens up a process whereby recognition can change how representation of particular parties is viewed; this can be seen as an ongoing process where both past and current recognition can influence how parties are perceived (Thomassen 2011).

The instances of recognition described here are part of the performative act with each instance changing how the 'subjects' (here, the national representatives and their viewpoints) are constantly 'constituted and reconstituted' (Ferrarese 2011: 766). Such dynamics could change according to who has a seat at the table and could drive other countries to reformulate their recognition demands, questioning the parity in decision making processes within the common political space. The development of new forms of recognition of these countries is a process of interaction with multiple 'recognitions or misrecognitions' contributing to the forming of new identities (Ferrarese 2011: 766).

Although many studies in REDD+ focus on power inequalities and lack of negotiating power at the subnational level (Beymar-Farris and Bassett 2012; Fairhead et al. 2012; Leach and Scoones 2014; Ribot and Larson 2012;



Chomba 2017), there are also challenges at the national level. As the cases of Cameroon and Gabon illustrate, the negotiation of a project confers recognition to those sitting at the negotiation table, however the reasons for accepting recognition or being misrecognised are likely linked to the wider climate change arena, in this case an international one, in which the negotiating parties are embedded.

In Central Africa, countries engage in different ways. Several country representatives praised the Project as a rare case of full consultation. Indeed, one country representative said that based on the experience, he and his colleagues were pressuring other donors to consult with them in a similar way (phone interview, 2013). This engaging and disengaging appears to happen in an 'instance of recognition', where those who are being offered recognition or misrecognition accept or reject it. The result of such an instance is likely determined by contributing factors from the negotiating table and including development policies and economics. In the case of Cameroon, recognition in REDD+ is granted and accepted by both parties as the country continues on the path of REDD+ Readiness. By contrast, Gabon has attempted to reset the negotiation table for them, and possibly for neighbouring countries, by disengaging from the REDD+ process and only partially engaging with the Project in order to continue their climate-change sensitive development plan on their own terms. Such a stance is not easily made in a context where many countries engage in REDD+ and where African NGOs, which heavily sway national REDD+ consultations (see Marfo 2015; Mbeche 2017; Nuesiri 2017), are influenced by much more powerful donors and larger NGOs (Hearn 2007) with decisions appearing to be made for Africa, rather than with her (Mbele 2010; Mbele 2015). Countries struggle to progress with REDD+ readiness phases; the complications of advancing REDD+ in a complex environment with governance and financial challenges may significantly reduce effectiveness of REDD+ or other climate change mitigation measures in Africa, potentially with global implications for the magnitude and consequences of climate change (Gizachew et al. 2017).

The issues described here in terms of project development are not unique and are likely part of other project development processes, especially in terms of unequal power balances of the donor and recipient. There is much to be learned from the process to inform future regional collaborative project development. First, when participating in collaborative project development, intervening agents must realise that in choosing an institution, a form of recognition occurs when that choice is accompanied by supporting full engagement with the recognised institution in terms of project negotiation. The expectations and actualities must be understood by all parties. The strain between governments and international organisations, such as the World Bank, can cause tension, sometimes referred to as 'agency slippage', when the governmental views are different from those of the international organisation (e.g. the World Bank, in this case) (Nielson and Tierney 2003). Participation in the project development process can range from nominal (consultation) to transformative

(involving decision-making); to be effective, all participants must have the same understanding of the type of project development engagement expected (Biggs and Smith 2003). In this case, although the Project was a new regional approach to development for the World Bank, the Project consultation process may have stymied innovation by country participants, making the negotiation process difficult, even if eventually a common ground is achieved.

The project cycle was also not able to accommodate national views easily. In some cases, this could render impotent the good intentions of committed project developers (Green 2012: 248). Although many donor agency project management cycles are rigid, they can be adapted to interface in a productive way with the culture of the governments with which they work (Biggs and Smith 2003). But to have a truly participatory process, one must expect a divergence of views to be expressed before agreement is reached (White 1996). Nonetheless, countries are sovereign entities and decision over project content and participation should be granted to the fullest extent, ensuring that stakeholders have equal power at the table.

At the same time that this World Bank-led Project was being developed, the Food and Agriculture Organisation was developing a regional REDD+ project through consultation with the same national representatives. In this other project the decision-making power accorded during project development to national representatives transferred a lot of power to the countries; this level of decision making was considered to be very high by the organisation's standards (Douala, Cameroon, in person interview, 2013). However, this donor chose to administer the project itself, creating a separate management unit for that purpose, rather than transferring project administration to regional or national partners. As such, little recognition of regional or national bodies occurred and the project had far less ownership than the one studied in this article. Clearly, the institutional choices have implications not only for recognising stakeholders but also in developing projects that are owned and implemented nationally.

These two projects piloted new ways for donors to work with countries and they continue this process in the Central Africa region with the Central Africa Forest Fund. What future donors expect from the countries and how their institutional choices shape their work with countries remains to be seen. Similarly, how countries alter their expectations in relation to these choices is likely to change.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank the various Central African authorities, regional project designers and managers for their time to participate in interviews and for providing project documentation. The authors thank the following people for feedback: all Responsive Forest Governance Initiative (RFGI) researchers, especially Jesse Ribot, Rebecca Rutt, James Murombedzi, René Oyono, and Emmanuel Nuesiri. Additional discussions that were useful in developing the paper were held with Olivier Hymas, Kenneth Angu Angu, George Akwah, and Charles Mbele, well as many unnameable informants. This project was supported in part by a Swedish International Development

Cooperation Agency grant entitled the Responsive Forest Governance Initiative to the Council for Social Science Research in Africa, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Comments by Sandra Caya, Dan Brockington, and three anonymous reviewers greatly improved the message of the paper.

## NOTES

1. The CBFP is a partnership of more than 70 members including states and NGOs working on conservation issues in Central Africa.
2. Of the 36 FCPF country participants, there are five participating COMIFAC countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo and Gabon.
3. According to Maniatis et al., countries show differences in their 'state of advancement' in the REDD+ adoption process. More advanced countries are developing approaches for measuring carbon, have a strategy for political engagement and have financing to engage; less advanced countries lack these things despite expressing interest in the process.
4. "GEF Agencies are responsible for creating project proposals and for managing GEF projects. The GEF Agencies play a key role in managing GEF projects on the ground; more specifically, GEF Agencies assist eligible governments and NGOs in the development, implementation, and management of GEF projects. ([http://www.thegef.org/gef/gef\\_agencies](http://www.thegef.org/gef/gef_agencies), accessed 11 March 2016)"
5. Interview with a project manager of another regional REDD+ project, 12 February 2013, Yaoundé, 12 February 2013.
6. According to the project appraisal document, COMIFAC was recognised as having a mandate for 'regional coordination, but not project implementation' (World Bank 2011).
7. The REDD+ Climate Change Focal Points are officials who hold high-level posts in the forest ministries of each country and represent the country at the UNFCCC meetings.
8. A vision commonly held by other Central African countries (Peach Brown et al. 2011).
9. Signed by Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, DRC, R. Congo, Rwanda, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom, the USA, and the European Commission.
10. Although this has not been without consequences, notably in the poor results of the projects themselves or the results on 'rentier state mentality' (Yates 1996: 203).
11. At the time, this was considered to be one of the largest independent infrastructure projects in the world.

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